

Dickcissel - *Spiza americana*

Abundance: Uncommon

Status: NSS4 (Bc)

NatureServe: G5 S1

Population Status: population size and distribution are restricted but extirpation is not imminent; the majority of the breeding population occurs on private lands in eastern Wyoming, so existing Breeding Bird Survey routes and Monitoring Wyoming's Birds survey transects may not adequately track population trends

Limiting Factor: Habitat (and Human Activity): limiting factors are moderate, but on-going habitat loss and degradation due to human activity are likely to increase and negatively affect population status and trends

Comment:

Introduction

The Dickcissel breeds from southern Saskatchewan, east to western New York, and south to southern Texas and northern Georgia. It winters from southwestern Mexico south to northern South America. During summer, it is scattered across most of Wyoming in grassland habitat, although breeding has been documented only in the eastern part of the State. The Dickcissel is considered an uncommon summer resident in Wyoming.

Habitat

The Dickcissel usually inhabits grasslands with taller grasses, forbs, or shrubs, but also uses alfalfa and hayfields. It prefers habitat with dense vegetation, a high abundance of forbs, moderately deep litter, and singing perches.

Problems

- h Local breeding populations are impacted by loss of nests and nestlings when fields are mowed during the nesting season.
- h Winter habitat has been highly modified by ranching operations and grain production.
- h Nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds can be locally significant.
- h Heavy livestock grazing can be detrimental to nests, young, and the availability of prey.
- h Conversion of native grasslands to croplands and habitat loss to urbanization and industrialization have caused a contraction in this species' breeding range and rangewide population declines.

Conservation Actions

- h Conserve grassland habitats by minimizing the conversion of native prairie to croplands, fragmentation, roads, urban development, exotic plants, and a shift in community ecology characteristics.
- h Avoid or minimize pesticide use in habitats where this species nests to ensure a food source is maintained. If possible, all pesticide use should be postponed until this species has completed its breeding cycle.
- h Continue inventory and monitoring efforts and implement the Monitoring Wyoming's Birds grid-based monitoring program to determine density and population trends.
- h Develop and maintain a positive relationship with landowners on whose property this species nests. Educate and cultivate a feeling of participation in landowners to promote beneficial land use practices and management for this species on private land.
- h Encourage landowners to avoid potentially negative impacts to nesting areas through the use of financial incentives.
- h In areas where this species nests, conduct prescribed burns in the fall to avoid loss of nesting cover. Burns should be relatively small so a portion of the area contains nesting cover at all times and adequate residual cover for nesting is retained for the following spring.
- h Manage nesting areas to minimize conflicts with natural resources extraction, wind power development, and recreational activities during the breeding season.
- h Manage nesting areas to minimize disturbance (including haying, burning, and moderate to heavy grazing) during the breeding season.
- h In areas where this species nests, provide large areas of grassland habitat (10 to 30 ha [25 to 75 ac]) with dense, tall vegetation; a high abundance of forbs; moderately deep litter; and singing perches.

Monitoring/Research

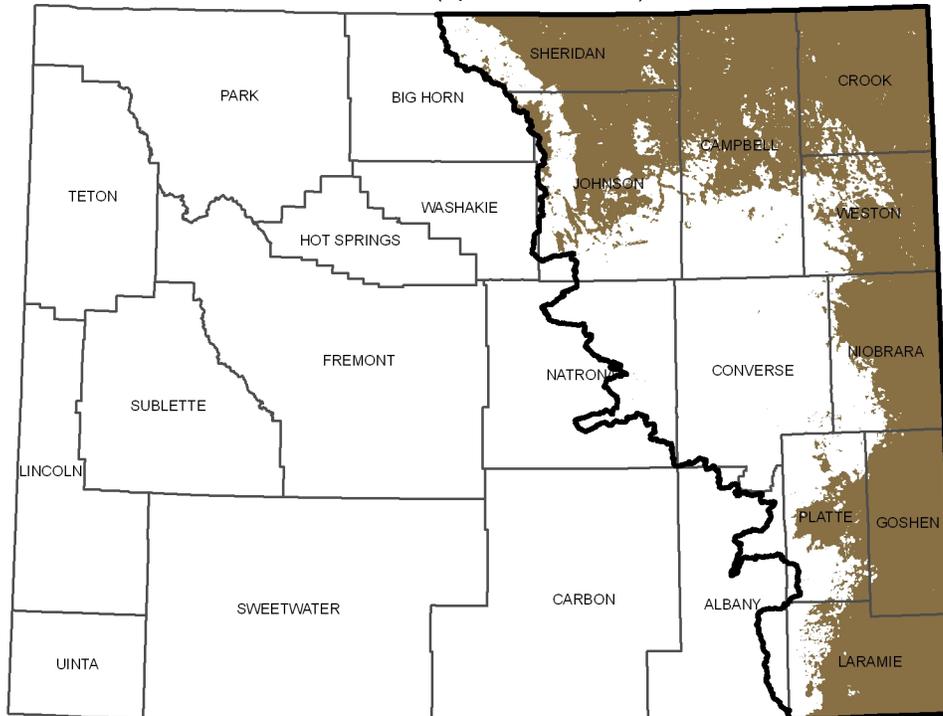
In addition to the Monitoring Wyoming's Birds program, ensure that Breeding Bird Survey routes in grassland habitats are conducted to determine population density and trends. State Wildlife Grants project to develop essential datasets and a plan for minimizing wildlife and community conflicts with wind development in southeastern Wyoming.

Recent Developments

Populations of grassland birds have declined rangewide more than any other group of birds due to habitat degradation, fragmentation, and loss from industrial developments, urbanization, and conversion to croplands. This species may exhibit aerial courtship displays during the breeding season. If so, wind power development in nesting areas could be problematic.

References

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- Dechant JA, Sondreal ML, Johnson DH, Igl LD, Goldade CM, Zimmerman AL, Euliss BR. 2003. Effects of management practices on grassland birds: Dickcissel. Jamestown (ND): Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. Online: <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/literatr/grasbird/dick/dick.htm>.
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SOURCE: Digital maps of ranges and predicted distributions for Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need: April 2010. Wyoming Natural Diversity Database. University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming. Note that brown indicates the predicted distribution of the species; heavy black lines indicate outermost boundaries of possible occurrence.